THE ALIEN LABOUR LAW.

The Double-Faced Policy of the Laurier Government.

A Law Which Was Never Intended to be Enforced.

Barefaced Attempt to Deceive the Workingmen of Canada.

In the year 1885, the Congress of the United States passed an Alien Labour Law, under the operation of which numbers of Canadian artisans and labourers were prohibited from working in that country.

Representations were repeatedly made by the Canadian authorities to the Government at Washington, protesting against the enforcement of this harsh and unfriendly measure. These representations were, however, of no avail. Complaints were general from our border cities that workingmen who lived in them, but who were employed in the United States, were obliged to become citizens of that country, and remove their families there, or be deprived of employment; while, at the same time, United States citizens who resided on the other side of the line were permitted to come over to Canada and work here without let or hindrance. This condition of affairs was loudly protested against by our workingmen, and the aid of the Canadian Parliament invoked on their behalf.

In the session of 1890, Mr. George Taylor, member of Parliament for South Leeds, introduced in the House a Bill which was an exact copy of the United States Alien Labour Law, prohibiting the importation and immigration of foreigners and aliens under contract or agreement to perform labour in Canada. Mr. Taylor's Bill was referred to a Committee, which reported that they had examined witnesses and had ascertained that the United States Alien Labour Law was being opressively applied to Canadians. The Committee recommended that before the passage of the Bill the attention of the United States authorities should be directed to the matter, and if our workingmen were not relieved from the grievances complained of, Parliament should pass a measure dealing with the subject.

Mr. Taylor introduced his Bill in succeeding sessions, but it failed to pass the House, owing to the desire of the Canadian authorities to secure the cessation of the enforcement of the United States Alien Labour Law against our workingmen, rather than place a law similar to that of the United States on our Statute Book.

In the fall session of 1896, Mr. Taylor again introduced his Bill, but at the request of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the measure was not pressed, so as to give the Liberal Government the opportunity of further negotiation with the United States. In asking Mr. Taylor not to proceed with the Bill, the Premier, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, pledged himself as follows: "I will claim the privilege of asking him (Mr. Taylor) not to proceed further at present. . . . If, after having taken

cognizance of the correspondence (between the American and Canadian authorities), we find there is no way of escaping the conclusion at which my hon. friend has arrived, I will give him every opportunity at the next session of the House to pass his Bill, if he thinks proper. Therefore, I will move the adjournment of the debate."

TWO BILLS INTRODUCED.

The efforts of the past and present Governments having proved futile, in the session of 1897 two Alien Labour Law Bills were simultaneously introduced in the Canadian Parliament by Messrs. M. K. Cowan, member for South Essex, and George Taylor, member for South Leeds; but Mr. Cowan's Bill was given precedence, notwithstanding the Premier's solemn pledge at the preceding session. In the discussion which took place on these Bills, Sir Wilfrid Laurier said: "There cannot be any doubt as to the position of the Government upon this Bill. In fact, I do not know whether it is at all desirable to prolong the debate any longer, because so far as I can interpret the sentiments of the House, there is an unanimous feeling at this moment, whatever may have been the opinions of members in the past, that the persistence of the American Congress in keeping upon their statute books this very obnoxious law leaves no alternative to the Canadian people, but to apply the same law themselves. . . . The course adopted by our neighbours seems to leave no option to us but to apply to them the same measure of justice or of injustice as they applied to us."—Hansard, 1897. Page 658.

A DEFECTIVE BILL ADOPTED.

He then moved that the Bill be referred to a special Committee, consisting of Sir Louis Davies, Messrs. Sifton, Langelier and Cowan, Liberals; and Messrs. Casgrain, Taylor and Wood (Brockville), Conservatives. A majority of this Committee recommended a consolidated Bill, which was strongly opposed for the reason that it was not a workable measure, and that any action for the violation of its provisions must be brought by the Attorney-General of Canada or by some person authorized by him. In Mr. Taylor's Bill anyone could set the law in motion. Notwithstanding many protests, owing to its defects, the Bill was adopted by the House on the 7th June, 1897, and was introduced in the Senate two days later.

Despite the fact that in the House of Commons on the 7th of April, Sir Wilfrid Laurier declared that there could be no doubt as to the position of the Government on this Bill, and that Parliament had no option but to pass the measure, his colleague, the Secretary of State, the Hon. R. W. Scott, used every means in his power to defeat the Bill in the Senate!

On June 19th, at Page 693, of the Senate Hansard, he declared, "It is absurd to suppose that the persons who wish to enforce the law can apply to the authorities to do so."

This objection was practically the same as that taken by Mr. Taylor in the House of Commons to the clause which provided that the Act could only be put in force by the permission of the Minister of Justice.

In his persistent efforts to defeat the Bill, Sir Wilfrid Laurier's colleague, the Secretary of State, used every means at his disposal to influence the Senate. He declared, "I do not think the Act is likely to be enforced, and when it is not enforced it is a pity to place it on the Statute Books, because it is not on a line with the views of the people of Canada. . . . I should be sorry to see it on the Statute Books, because I know it would be an idle Act. It would be an announcement that we were going to do it, and we would not do it. . . . I advise that it be dropped, because it is not a Bill that should be enforced unless there was machinery provided. . . . Under this Act persons can come in by thousands, and it is only when a report is sent to the Attorney-General, and he makes enquiry, that any action would be taken, and of course the party would by that time be absorbed in the community, and that would be the end of it. It is something which we do not propose to carry out. . . . We know as a matter of fact that this law is not intended to be put in operation. The manner in which it is drawn shows that it really is not a practical measure. . . . If the Attorney-General has to be appealed to in every important case, there is no serious intention of putting the law into operation. The 6th clause must have been introduced by some person for the purpose of throwing ridicule on the Bill."

Sir Oliver Mowat, then Minister of Justice, another of Sir Wilfrid Laurier's colleagues, on Page 698 of the Senate Hansard, declared, "He did not think it desirable to amend this Bill, as we run the risk of losing it altogether."

From the foregoing extracts it will be observed that although the Premier of Canada solemnly declared in the House of Commons that the Government were a unit in support of the measure, and that they felt constrained to take action because of the continued enforcement of the United States Alien Labour Law, yet the Premier's colleagues in the Senate announced that the measure was unworkable, that it was not intended to be enforced ,and that it was inadvisable to make it workable lest the Bill should not pass at all! What do the workingmen of Canada think of this two-faced conduct?

THE AIM OF THE GOVERNMENT.

The aim of the Government was to induce the Senate to throw out the Bill altogether, and then lay the blame for its defeat on the members of the Upper Chamber. But the scheme did not work. The Senate passed the Bill in due course, notwithstanding the persistent efforts of the Premier's colleague to encompass its destruction.

The Act received the Royal assent on the 29th of June, 1897, and became the law of the land. The Government were thenceforth in duty bound to put it in operation so as to give Canadian workmen that measure of protection to which they were justly entitled. But Sir Wilfrid Laurier and his colleagues never intended to do anything of the kind. The Act has been continuously violated for the past three years, and there has not been a single conviction secured!

Although appeal after appeal has been made to the Government from the wage-earners in different parts of the country asking for the enforcement of the law, these appeals have fallen upon deaf ears. In several places Alien Labour Law officers were appointed, but their appointment was only a sham, for they were not given instructions to enforce the law. There was only one prosecution begun in the District of Toronto, and when the case was ready for trial the Government would not allow it to be proceeded with!

It was nearly twelve months after the Act became law before the officer was appointed at Toronto. On the 12th of May, 1898, Mr. David A. Carey, President of the Dominion Trades Congress, wired to the House of Commons from Toronto as follows: "Flagrant infringement of the Act still continues. Does Government not intend to protect us? Mr. W. B. McMurrich has gone to Muskoka and will not return until next week." A dispute had arisen between employers and men, which unfortunately resulted in a strike or lockout, and the places of some of the operatives were promptly filled by men brought from the United States. The Commissioner, Mr. McMurrich, referred to in Mr. Carey's telegram, had in the meantime gone to Muskoka for a holiday! And this is the way Canadian workmen were being "Protected!"

Many times during the session of Parliament in 1898 the Government were urged to enforce the law, but to no avail. On the 1st of June, 1898, replying to a question, Sir Wilfrid Laurier admitted that no officer had been appointed at Hamilton, but he said he believed that "after a few months there will be no cause for such appointment." Yet in May, 1899, nearly a year after, when the Minister of Justice was appealed to by Mayor J. V. Teetzel, of Hamilton, to enforce the law, he replied as follows:

"Ottawa, May 27th, 1899.

"J. V. Teetzel, Esq.,

"Mayor, Hamilton, Ont.:

"The Attorney-General is not at liberty to give his assent to the prosecution for the infraction of the Alien Labour Law, to which you refer, an understanding having been reached last summer by the Commissioners that the Alien Labour Law, until the negotiations were concluded, should remain in abeyance in Canada in respect to persons from the United States, and in the United States in respect to persons coming from Canada. Until it is shown that this understanding is not observed by the United States officers, no action can be taken here.

(Signed) DAVID MILLS.

THE GRAND TRUNK STRIKE.

When the trackmen on the Grand Trunk Railway, who were receiving less than one dollar a day, quit work, in the Spring of 1899, in an endeavour to procure higher wages, gangs of foreigners were imported to fill their places. The Government were notified, but they did absolutely nothing. The Premier denied that the places of the strikers were being filled from the United States by the Grand Trunk authorities. He repeated the excuse offered in the letter quoted above from the Hon. David Mills, Minister of Justice, that it was agreed between the Canadian and United States authorities that the practice of enforcing the law should be, as far as possible, discontinued on both sides of the line, pending an arrangement by the Commission. On the day after the Premier made this declaration, Mr. John Ross Robertson, M.P., read in the House of Commons an interview with Inspector DeBarry at Buffalo, in which that officer emphatically declared that the United States Alien Labour Law had not been suspended, and would not be suspended, but was still being enforced. In fact, he said that the labour people of Buffalo were then preparing a Bill for submission to Congress making the law even more stringent than it was.

So it will be seen that while the law was being rigidly enforced against Canadians on the American side of the line, it was completely ignored on the Canadian side. The assertion of Sir Wilfrid Laurier that the law was not to be enforced was simply laughed at—as it deserved to be—by the United States Labour Commissioners.

The Toronto Globe of August 17, 1899, contains a report of an inquest on the body of an Italian labourer who was killed while working on the Grand Trunk Railway track at Mimico, in which the following statement is made: "The foreman of the jury asked the witness, an Italian, if he had been hired in the States to come here to work as a trackman. The man said he had, and admitted also that he and other Italians, among whom was the deceased, received passes to come to Toronto."

The Toronto Star, a staunch supporter of the Government, in its issue of August 17, 1899, has the following editorial: "The attention of the Government, which affects blissful ignorance of violations of the Alien Labour Law, is drawn to an incident at an inquest last night in Mimico, where among the witnesses were Italian navvies working on the Grand Trunk Railway, one of whom admitted, in reply to a juror, that he had been hired in the United States to come here to work as a trackman, also that he and other Italians, among whom was the deceased, received passes to come to Toronto. This is not the first time the Star has called attention to the matter; this is not the first time the Government has been informed of similar violations of the law which is being held in abeyance on an understanding with the United States, but to which the United States does not live up. These Italian labourers do not make good citizens. They rarely make citizens of any sort; they are birds of passage, and they take the work which should go to men living in the country and who make their homes here. In view of the era of extensive railway construction upon which Canada is entering, the Alien Labour Law is a most desirable measure if it is to be enforced, and the matter calls for the Government's attention."

The publication of these facts did not arouse the Government to action, and alien labourers were free to come into Canada just when and where they pleased.

UNFAIR TO MINERS.

Bad as was the treatment accorded to Canadian labourers and operatives in the older Provinces, that given to the miners in British Columbia was even worse. A despatch from Vancouver, dated November 2nd, 1899, reads as follows:

"The strike in the Slocan country has reached a crisis, and the Silver Lead Miners' Association has commenced importing Italian labourers from the United States. The first consignment arrived to-day for the Payne mine from Seattle, being sent in under contract by a Seattle employment Agency to the Silver Lead Miners' Association."

"The citizens of Sandon and members of the Mining Union of Slocan are very indignant, and will take steps to have the Alien Labour Law enforced. Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Hewitt Bostock, M.P. for Yale-Cariboo, will be appealed to. The British Columbia Ministry will be asked to co-operate to secure the enforcement of the law. No disturbance is looked for, but the miners make frequent mention of the belief that the imported labourers are brought in for the purpose of inciting them to violence."

Instances like the foregoing might be multiplied to show the two-faced course the Government has pursued towards the toilers of the Dominion, but they are not necessary. The independent press of the country has been loud in its denunciation of the Government.

We reprint a couple of extracts:

The Hamilton Herald, of Thursday, November 22nd, 1899, says: "The Dominion Alien Labour Law remains suspended. In fact, it never was enforced, and for this non-enforcement the lie that the United States Alien Labour Law is suspended has been the excuse."

To the foregoing strong statement the Ottawa Evening Journal, another Independent newspaper, in its issue of November 4th, 1899, makes the following addition: "'Lie' is a very strong word. But we really do not feel competent to take exception to its use in this case. Perhaps one should be grateful that DeBarry does not prevent the engagement of Sir Wilfrid Laurier to make nice speeches in Chicago and other places. Anyway, what do a few poor devils of Canadian workingmen matter? It is only the British Government which declines to submit to injustice to a single British citizen, though the protest must take the Empire into war."

WAGE EARNERS INDIGNANT.

The Government are aware of the indignation which their cowardly conduct has given rise to among the wage-earners of the Dominion, but they hope to appease their wrath by the passage of a clap-trap resolution about "a fair day's wage for a fair day's work." The attempt will fail, however, for a Government that have so signally neglected to protect the honest labour of Canada will meet with the punishment they deserve when the voice of labour is heard at the polls.

At great expense, the present Government brought thousands of Galician, Doukhobor and other foreign immigrants into the North-West. Some of these immigrants were induced to move to California; but were prevented from crossing into the United States because the Government had the United States Alien Labour Law enforced against them at Pembina and elsewhere!

Just think of the Canadian Government urging the American authorities to enforce their Alien Labour Law!! And this, too, against immigrants they had just brought to Canada at great expense to the tax-payers of the country.

When Mr. Taylor first introduced the Alien Labour Law Bill, the Hon. David Mills, who is now a Senator, and the Minister of Justice in Sir Wilfrid Laurier's Cabinet, was a member of the House of Commons. In the course of a speech delivered against Mr. Taylor's Bill, he declared: "I cannot conceive a state of circumstances in which it would ever be to the advantage of Canada to adopt such a measure."

Evidently, Mr. Mills and his colleagues in the Government entertain the same opinion to-day.

What do the workmen think of them?